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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: OBAMA, GOOGLE, U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage January 26 on President Ma Ying-jeou's nomination of the island's top prosecutor Monday; on developments in cross-Straits relations; on President Ma Ying-jeou's visit to Honduras and the Dominican Republic; on Taiwan's rescue and relief efforts in Haiti; and on the legislative by-elections slated for the end of February.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" discussed the first year of U.S. President Barack Obama and said Obama, like Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou, has lost his halo and is running out of charisma. A column in the KMT-leaning "China Times" discussed Google's recent threat to quit China and said the United States has learned from its previous practice that the Internet can be its very powerful and exclusive weapon against other countries. An op-ed in the China-focused "Want Daily" discussed the development of U.S. policy in Asia and concluded that deepening the United States' relations with its alliances, security in East Asia, and the United States' participation in regional cooperation in Asia are the axes of Washington's Asian policy. An op-ed in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," written by a Western commentator, discussed U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and said "selling weapons to Taiwan would empower it without inserting the US into any cross-Straits crossfire." End summary.

¶3. Obama

"Obama Has Lost His Halo"

Columnist Antonio Chiang wrote in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 530,000] (1/26):

"When [U.S. President Barack] Obama was elected, he pledged to change the world and change the United States. But one year has passed, and Obama has even failed to keep his campaign promise as

simple as closing down the Guantanamo Bay prison. Also, his party was defeated in every [follow-on] election; furthermore, the Democratic Party's defeat in the Senate election in Massachusetts last week was a big warning signal! Obama is running out of charisma. ... The approval rating for Obama, who previously enjoyed high popularity, has now dropped to 50 percent. Some claimed that he is too rational, values logic, but lacks passion, while others said he lost his father and his mother was not around him when he was young; he is used to being independent and alone. All those [attributes] that used to be deemed as his strong points have now gradually become his weak points.

"In reality, most people know that they had unrealistic expectations for him [a year ago]. He had such inspiring eloquence, plus the serious mistakes made by [former President] George W. Bush, so people put all their hopes on him. Monday he promised to resolve the problem of climate change; Tuesday he said he would solve the unemployment problem; Wednesday it was about the financial crisis; Thursday was educational reform; Friday Afghanistan; Saturday Iraq; and Sunday, he needed to settle the rest of the problems. He

constantly shows up on TV, still very eloquent, but once people have got used to seeing him all the time, they lost curiosity. People are fickle, so his popularity plunges quickly. ... Obama promised to close down the notorious prison in Guantanamo Bay in a year, and now the check has bounced. The prisoners are too dangerous to be released, and since their oral depositions were not acquired legally, they could not be presented at court. As a result, he achieved almost nothing when it comes to Israel and Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. If one hardly achieves anything in the first year of his term, he will find it more difficult to put his ability to good use in the following three years. How similar is Obama's situation to that of Ma's."

4. Google

"Internet -- the United States' Exclusive Weapon"

The "International Lookout" column in the KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] wrote (1/26):

"'Google' is a business, but it has lost its authority to run its business once it becomes a political tool. Google wants to stay in the Chinese market, where there are plentiful business opportunities. But under the close watch of the U.S. government, media, U.S. trade association and human rights activists, it finds itself facing a dilemma. After all, both the U.S. president and the secretary of state have made open remarks urging it to resist China. Having turned the matter over in its mind, the Obama administration still believes that it is more effective to deal with China via the Internet than to pressure the Renminbi to appreciate. Internet is the United States' exclusive weapon. ...

"Washington cut off the instant messaging service of Cuba, North Korea and Sudan last year, opening up a new means of international

sanctions. In the wake of the presidential election in Iran last year, the Iranian government announced that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected. Yet major websites throughout the United States were releasing news to the world saying that Mir-Hossein Mousavi of the opposition party was elected, causing huge chaos in Iran. Demonstrations and protests nearly turned Iran upside down. The United States has truly learned that such a means was able to bring down any political power in a country that it wants to overthrow.

"Because such a soft [means of] mass destruction can be very powerful, according to international law, a country has the right to govern and control the Internet as part of its sovereignty. It is not allowed to use the Internet to overturn a government, spread pornography and disrupt public order. ... The Obama administration wants to use Google's [case] to do something against China. The reactions that such a move will trigger are imaginable, as this is definitely no small matter."

5. U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations

A) "Developments in the United States' Asian Policy"

Liu Fu-kuo, research fellow at the Division of American and European Studies, Institute of International Studies, National Chengchi University, opined in the China-focused "Want Daily" [circulation: 10,000] (1/26):

"... A combination of the analyses above showed that the axes of the United States' Asian policy include: deepening bilateral relations with its alliances and adding new meaning to them, East Asian security, and the issue and prospects regarding U.S. participation in regional cooperation in Asia. Key issues derived from such axes are as follows: the U.S.-Japan security treaty, constructing a new framework for U.S.-China relations, the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula and security in Northeast Asia, the United States building a dialogue partnership with the ASEAN nations, and the importance to re-initiate the APEC call for regional cooperation. ..."

B) "US Arms Sales Crucial for Taiwan"

Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and a fellow with the American Conservative Defense Alliance, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation:

30,000] (1/26):

"The Obama administration is preparing a new arms package for Taiwan. Ironically, selling weapons to Taipei may be the best way for Washington to get out from the middle of one of the world's potentially most volatile relationships -- the one between China and Taiwan. Relations between the two are improving, yet the former continues to point more than 1,300 missiles at the latter. The threat of military force remains a backdrop to expanding economic and tourist contacts across the Taiwan Strait. The US is positioned uneasily between them. Formally committed to the principle of one China and providing weapons to Taiwan for its defense, Washington cannot easily square the circle. As the People's Republic of China (PRC) grows in economic strength and international influence, pressure will grow on the US' relationship with Taipei. ...

"While the PRC cannot, at least for the foreseeable future, match US military power, it can create a substantial deterrent capability, sharply raising the potential cost of US intervention. Beijing's increasing ability to sink US carriers with submarines and missiles alone would force any president to hesitate sending the Seventh Fleet into the strait for battle. As protecting Taiwan goes from being a guaranteed freebie to a potential catastrophe, Taipei will no longer be able to rely upon the US. Taiwan has been a good friend for many years, but few US presidents would decide to protect Taipei if doing so put Los Angeles and New York at risk. Arms sales offer the best path out of the Taiwan thicket. ...

"Of course, even fulfilling Taiwan's 'wish list' would not enable it to defeat China in a full-scale war. But Taipei needs sufficiency rather than equality -- a military capable of making any attempt at coercion more costly than the likely benefits of victory. So far China has been cautious and pragmatic in exercising its increased diplomatic influence and military power. Taiwan needs enough military force with enough capabilities to reinforce these good instincts. Before leaving office the Bush administration resumed arms sales. Now a new deal is in the works. The PRC responded that the US 'should respect China's core interests.' Nevertheless, there should be no US retreat from the principle of selling Taipei the weapons that it needs for its defense. Taiwanese have built a free and democratic society. They deserve access to the tools that will enable them to defend that society.

"Moreover, the best strategy for ensuring a peaceful resolution of Taipei's status is a robust Taiwanese defensive capability. Selling arms is a far better option than intervening militarily in any

conflict. To presume that China, with far more at stake than the US, will forever back down would be a wild gamble. Whether Chinese concerns are driven more by nationalist passions or geostrategic concerns, the more direct Washington's involvement, the more dangerous Beijing's likely response. And there would be no greater calamity than a war between the US and China. The US should not be expected to risk major war with nuclear powers to protect other states, however friendly or democratic. But Washington can help other nations defend themselves. Selling weapons to Taiwan would empower it without inserting the US into any cross-strait crossfire."

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